

Madam Speaker, I strongly support H.R. 3888 today. I have had my personal experience, as a number of people have, in terms of being slammed. I find that I am not unique. The distinguished gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Bliley), chairman of the Committee on Commerce and the head of the 'Congressional Bow Tie Caucus,' has similarly been treated, I understand, by the industry.

So I am pleased today with the legislation that is coming forward. But I am concerned that there is one provision that we saw in the Senate that is not included, which I hope that before we are through the legislative process that there will be an opportunity to include. That is the truth in billing provision that was amended into the Senate bill unanimously.

It is very similar to legislation that I have introduced in the House, H.R. 4018, that has over 50 cosponsors. Truth in billing would require that the telephone carriers provide accurate information to customers about both the increases and reductions in consumer charges resulting from regulatory action.

There has been a great deal that has happened as a result of telecommunications deregulation, but I cite just one example: the confusion surrounding the e-rate that speaks to the need for more complete billing information.

Consumers did not understand that the new line items were for all of universal service, including rural telephone service which has been in place for some 60 years. Nor did they understand that the cost to current phone companies had already been reduced by, we think, approximately \$3 billion, which is far more than we were talking about with the e-rate, which would have provided access to the Internet for our schools and libraries.

Madam Speaker, I hope that we will be able, as I say, to refer to the provisions of H.R. 4018, the truth in billing, because the FCC does have, although it has initiated rulemaking for truth in billing, it is a step in the right direction. But it is important that the FCC's action be grounded in specific legislative authorization.

I would fear that we not be silent on giving consumers clarity on their phone bill. This Congress has much to be pleased with the progress that has been made. I think giving full disclosure about increases and decreases in the phone rates that are charged by the phone companies will give consumers the information they need to adequately make their assessments.

Madam Speaker, I hope that the House will accept any Senate amendments to include truth in billing.

As one who had my long distance carrier switched without my knowledge, I strongly support efforts to end this unscrupulous practice.

I want to take a minute to talk about a consumer protection that the Senate included in its anti-slamming bill, that is not in the bill before us today, specifically truth in billing.

Truth in billing requires that telephone carriers provide information about both increases and reductions in consumer charges resulting from regulatory actions--this is absolutely critical if consumers are to have a clear understanding of how deregulation of the telecommunications marketplace affects their pocketbook.

The recent controversy over line item charges associated with the E-Rate is a perfect example of the confusion that can be caused by incomplete billing information.

Consumers did not understand that most of the new line items were for programs which have been in place for 60 years to provide service to rural areas.

Nor did they understand that costs to phone companies had already been reduced by more than they were being asked to pay the e-rate.

My legislation to provide for some truth in billing currently has 50 cosponsors.

Some might say that this legislation is unnecessary, since the FCC has initiated a rulemaking on truth in billing. I am hopeful that their process will be successful. However, I think this critical proceeding must be grounded in specific legislative authorization.

